

Conservation Commission Meeting

Tuesday, May 13, 2025 at 6:30 PM

Town Hall: Second Floor Meeting Room, 173 Main Street Groton, MA

OPTION TO JOIN REMOTELY

Present: Bruce Easom, Chair; Larry Hurley, Vice Chair; Kim Kuliesis (via Zoom), Clerk; Olin Lathrop, John Smigelski, Peter Morrison

Absent: Alison Hamilton

Others Present: Charlotte Steeves, Conservation Administrator

1. APPOINTMENTS AND HEARINGS

6:30 PM- Discussion: Town Baseball Field Trench

Applicant: Town of Groton, Representative: Tim Power, PVI Site Design LLC

T. Power attended the meeting to present a proposal for installing a stone trench at the base of the hill along the first base line. The purpose of the trench is to capture and infiltrate runoff water, thereby reducing the amount of fertilizer entering the nearby wetland.

L. Hurley inquired whether the trench would be located on the eastern side. T. Power confirmed that it would be installed on the eastern side, closest to the library. He further explained that this work involves extending the existing infiltration system along the first base line.

B. Easom suggested that incorporating piping to direct filtered water into the wetland would enhance the current design.

O. Lathrop expressed concern that fertilizer might still enter the wetland. In response, T. Power stated that a significant portion of runoff from the parking lot would be infiltrated by the trench. As a result, the fertilizer would have more time to be absorbed into the ground due to the reduced volume of water, thus decreasing the risk of contamination.

T. Power also clarified that the proposed project is located outside of the wetland buffer zone.

Upon a motion by P. Morrison, seconded by L. Hurley, it was:

Voted that the Town Baseball Field Trench proposal is outside the Conservation Commissions jurisdiction and does not require a filing.

The motion passed by a roll call vote. (Yes: KK, JS, PM, LH, OL, BE) 6-0

6:40 PM Continued Public Hearing- Notice of Intent- Off Worthen Drive- DEP#169-1278

Applicant: Jodi Gilson, Representative: Frank Mcpartland, Dillis & Roy Civil Design Group

The applicant requested a continuance.

Upon a motion by P. Morrison, seconded by J. Smigelski, it was:
Voted to continue the public hearing to the next scheduled meeting on May 27, 2025.
The motion passed by a roll call vote. (Yes: KK, OL, PM, JS, LH, BE) 6-0

6:42 PM- Continued Public Hearing- 6 Island Road- DEP# 169-1279

Applicant: Megan and Jessie Cotter, Representative: Dan Memont, Design Dynamics

D. Memont reported that a revised plan has been submitted.

C. Steeves noted that she received comments from the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), which included a request for clarification on how the wetland boundary was determined. In response, D. Memont submitted photographs and explanatory comments to the DEP indicating the location of the high-water mark. He also referenced Chapter 91 and mentioned that, due to the slope of the site, it may be advisable to use erosion controls beyond standard hay bales.

Upon a motion by J. Smigelski, seconded by P. Morrison, it was:
Voted to continue the public hearing.
The motion passed by a roll call vote. (Yes: KK, LH, PM, JS, OL, BE) 6-0

6:50 PM- Issue Order of Conditions- 6 Island Road- DEP# 169-1279

Applicant: Megan and Jessie Cotter, Representative: Dan Memont, Design Dynamics

Upon a motion by P. Morrison, seconded by L. Hurley, it was:
Voted to issue the Order of Conditions for 6 Island Road, MassDEP#169-1279.
The motion passed by a roll call vote. (Yes: OL, JS, PM, LH, KK, BE) 6-0

Upon a motion by P. Morrison, seconded by J. Smigelski, it was:
Voted to issue the Orders of Conditions under the Groton Wetlands Protection Bylaw for 6 Island Road, MassDEP#169-1279.
The motion passed by a roll call vote. (Yes: OL, PM, JS, LH, KK, BE) 6-0

7:00 PM- Continued Public Hearing- Notice of Intent- 63 Gratuity Road- DEP# PENDING

Applicant: Routhier & Roper Gratuity Road LLC; Representative Matthew Waterman, Landtech Consultants

The applicant requested a continuance.

Upon a motion by P. Morrison, seconded by J. Smigelski, it was:
Voted to continue the public hearing to the next scheduled meeting on May 27, 2025.
The motion passed by a roll call vote. (Yes: KK, LH, JS, PM, OL, BE) 6-0

C. Steeves stated that she would request permission to access the property.

7:02 Notice of Intent- 71-75 Shenandoah Road- DEP# 169-1280

Applicant: Allen Ackerman, Representative: Jack Maloney, Dillis & Roy Civil Design Group

J. Maloney appeared on behalf of his client proposing replacing the septic systems serving three structures on the property. The project includes replacing two existing cesspools and installing a new shared Presby septic system. A new well is also to be installed, replacing existing shallow wells. Additional project details include: the installation of a waterline sleeve, a siltation control device on the lower side of the site, replacement of an existing railroad tie retaining wall with a new precast concrete block wall, and the installation of a patio area.

P. Morrison asked how excess material would be managed and if the wells would be decommissioned. J. Maloney responded that all excess material would be removed from the site, and confirmed that the existing wells would be decommissioned according to regulations. A. Ackerman noted a low spot on the gravel access road that may require fill and mentioned that some stumps would be removed and backfilled. J. Maloney confirmed that the area being filled is outside of the buffer zones.

L. Hurley inquired about the proposed septic tanks and pump chambers. J. Maloney confirmed that solid waste would remain in the pump chambers and the liquid would be pumped up to the main dwelling.

O. Lathrop expressed concern over the number of trees being removed and requested that a replanting plan using native species be submitted. K. Kuliesis suggested including native oak trees in the replanting plan due to their ecological value and habitat benefits.

J. Maloney confirmed that the site is located within an Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC).

Upon a motion by P. Morrison, seconded by J. Smigelski, it was:
Voted to close the public hearing.

The motion passed by a roll call vote. (Yes: OL, PM, JS, LH, KK, BE) 6-0

2. GENERAL BUSINESS*

2.1. General Discussions/Announcements

Discussion: Invasive Species Informational Sign at Sorhaug Woods

P. Funch attended the meeting to request permission to display an invasive species educational sign on the backside of the Williams Barn.

O. Lathrop expressed concerns about the appropriateness of the sign's content; stating that it appeared overly simplified and seemed to be directed exclusively at a very young audience, such as second graders. P. Funch responded that the sign was intentionally designed to target younger children and to serve as an introductory educational tool for that age group.

K. Kuliesis suggested requesting alternative sign designs.

Upon a motion by P. Morrison, seconded by L. Hurley, it was:
Voted to approve the Invasive Species sign presented by the Trails Committee.

**The motion passed by a roll call vote. (Yes PM, JS, LH, KK, BE /NO: OL)
5-1**

Encroachment at Surrenden Farm: 17 James Brook Way, Ayer

B. Easom reported that he visited the parcel on Saturday and spoke with an abutter from Ayer regarding ongoing concerns. O. Lathrop noted that this matter has been a recurring issue and noted that the homeowners have an easement with the Town of Groton permitting regular driveway use. He emphasized that the homeowners do not have the authority to restrict public access. During the site visit, piles of debris were observed on Town-owned land, along with stakes indicating potential locations for the installation of lighting and a fence.

The Commissioners unanimously agreed that the homeowner does not have the right to install fencing or lighting on Town property. However, as the matter falls outside the jurisdiction of the Conservation Commission, the Commissioners expressed uncertainty about the extent of their authority in this situation. They agreed that the issue should be referred to the Town Manager and the Select Board for further review and action. B. Easom offered to provide the Town Manager and Select Board with the historical background of the property to assist in addressing the matter.

O. Lathrop reported that an abutter has requested a formal letter from the Town confirming that the public has permission to access the land, as it is an easement owned by the Town and not by the adjacent homeowner.

An abutter, who was present at the meeting, clarified that a temporary fence was installed to facilitate tree removal and confirmed that the homeowners plan to install lighting on the property. She also noted that the debris observed on-site has remained there for approximately eight years. Additionally, the abutter stated that the homeowner had instructed her not to enter the area, despite her understanding that it is Town-owned land with a public easement.

B. Easom informed the abutter that the issue will be brought to the attention of the Select Board, who would be the appropriate authority to issue any formal letter regarding public access to the easement.

Discussion: Rodenticides and Wildlife

C. Steeves brought forward a proposal for the Commission to consider supporting public education regarding the dangers of rodenticide use. She noted that several other towns include information on their Conservation Commission webpages highlighting the risks associated with rodenticides. She referenced a local advocacy group working to ban or reduce the use of these substances, particularly in residential settings.

Darcy Donald shared that an informational meeting on this topic was recently held and drew an attendance of approximately 65 people. She explained that second-generation anticoagulant rodenticides do not kill rodents instantly and can cause harm to non-target wildlife and contaminate water sources. She added that the issue had also been presented to the Board of Health and emphasized the goal of increasing public awareness.

O. Lathrop supported the idea of the Commission playing an educational role and emphasized the importance of informing the public about safer pesticide options and responsible use. He clarified that while state regulations prevent towns from banning specific rodenticides or prescribing alternatives, the Commission can focus on public education. He cited the Town of North Andover as an example of a municipality that has taken similar steps. He also volunteered to help generate educational materials.

The Commission expressed general support for the initiative and agreed on the importance of public education. However, J. Smigelski, speaking from his experience as a farmer, emphasized the need for balance, noting that rodent infestations can pose serious issues and that some level of control is necessary. B. Easom added that rodenticides should not be a homeowner's first response and encouraged the use of alternative, less harmful control methods where possible.

Upon a motion by J. Smigelski, seconded by L. Hurly, it was:

Voted to authorize Olin Lathrop to draft educational content regarding the impacts of rodenticides on wildlife. The finalized information will be reviewed and, upon approval, displayed on the Conservation Commission's website to help inform and educate the public.

The motion passed by a roll call vote. (Yes: KK, JS, LH, PM, OL, BE) 6-0

309 Boston Road Update

C. Steeves reported that the homeowner has appealed the \$50 fine, and a court date has been scheduled for June 12th via Zoom. B. Easom recommended holding a public hearing concurrently to ensure the session can be officially recorded. Mark Haddad and Town Council are also expected to be in attendance.

54 Hill Road Enforcement Order

C. Steeves noted that the Department of Environmental Protection is actively discussing the issue.

Reorganization of Commission

B. Easom raised the concern that one member of the Commission has been unable to attend recent meetings, and it may be time to consider whether any action should be taken, as the Commission is currently not functioning as a full board. C. Steeves informed the Commission that Alison Hamilton had been notified of the situation and was expected to stop by the Town Hall to discuss the matter. The Commission agreed to table the discussion until the next meeting, at which point a final decision would be made.

2.2. Committee Updates

CPA Money Awarded at Town Meeting (\$200,000)

B. Easom announced that \$200,000 in Community Preservation Act (CPA) funding was approved at Town Meeting. He encouraged the Commission to begin considering potential uses for the funds.

L. Hurley provided an update on Sargisson Beach, stating that the spring cleanup has been completed. The docks, ropes, and buoys have also been installed in preparation for the season.

C. Steeves said that a Park Ranger has been hired for the summer and that she is still waiting on approval from Natural Heritage in regards to the installation of the security cameras.

O. Lathrop informed the Commission that a Garlic Mustard pull was conducted on Saturday at the Williams Barn. He also shared a photograph of the recent controlled burn at Nipmuc Meadows, noting that the burn was well-contained and highly successful. Additionally, the Invasive Species Committee carried out a Barberry removal effort at the Lawrence Park.

C. Steeves asked whether the Commission would like to be involved in the Planning Board's peer review process with Nitsch Engineering regarding the proposed development at 500 Main Street. The Commission agreed since no formal filing has been submitted to the Conservation Commission, participation at this stage would be premature.

2.3. Land Management & Acquisition

16 West Main Street

C. Steeves reported that there has been no response to the letter sent to an address in New Hampshire. She also noted that she has not yet received the return receipt (green card), and acknowledged that it may take several weeks to arrive.

O. Lathrop recommended considering alternative measures to obtain a response, given the lack of communication to date.

Westford Sportsmen Club

J. Smigelski expressed concern that there are still unresolved issues and questioned how much effort is being made. C. Steeves responded that she would provide the most recent email correspondence on the matter. B. Easom commented that he was satisfied with the current draft provided by the State.

2.4. Approve Meeting Minutes

Upon a motion by P. Morrison, seconded by L. Hurley, it was:

Voted to approve the meeting minutes for February 25, 2025 as amended.

The motion passed by a roll call vote. (Yes: KK, JS, LH, PM, OL, BE) 6-0

Upon a motion by P. Morrison, seconded by L. Hurley, it was:
Voted to approve the meeting minutes for April 22, 2025 as amended.
The motion passed by a roll call vote. (Yes: KK, OL, PM, JS, LH, BE) 6-0

2.5. Approve Invoices

None

3. Open Session for topics not reasonably anticipated 48 hours in advance of meeting*

C. Steeves informed the Commission that she received a letter related to a grant application being submitted by the Groton Conservation Trust. As part of the application, the Trust is requesting confirmation that the Conservation Commission is willing to serve as the Conservation Restriction (CR) holders for the Shepley Hills property.

Upon a motion by L. Hurley, seconded by O. Lathrop, it was:
Voted to authorize Bruce Easom, Chair of the Conservation Commission, to sign the letter drafted by the Conservation Administrator indicating the Commission's agreement to serve as the Conservation Restriction holders for the Shepley Hills property.
The motion passed by a roll call vote. (Yes: KK, OL, PM, JS, LH, BE) 6-0

4.Executive Session pursuant to MGL Ch. 30A, Sec. 21(6): * "To consider the purchase, exchange, lease, or value of real estate, if the chair declares that an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the negotiating position of the public body."

Unnecessary.

5. Adjournment

8:20 PM

Upon a motion by J. Smigelski, seconded by L. Hurley, it was:
Voted to adjourn the meeting.
The motion passed by a roll call vote. (Yes: KK, OL, PM, JS, LH, BE) 6-0

APPROVED: 6/10/2025